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Community Perceptions of the Importance of Heritage Protection Relative to Other Local Government Council Operations

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Abstract: Cultural heritage management at the local government level relies on community participation, mainly interested stakeholders, in the identification, nomination and, in some jurisdictions, the co-evaluation of heritage assets. These are then "listed," i.e., included in planning schemes and other development controls. Such inclusion in planning schemes is predicated on the assumption that the local community values its heritage, appreciates its protection and supports local council investment and actions in the matter. This assumption is treated as axiomatic but only very rarely formally tested. Drawing on a community heritage survey in Albury, a regional service center in southern New South Wales (Australia), this paper discusses the perceptions held by the community on the relative importance of heritage protection when compared with the other services offered by council. The findings show that the community ranked cultural and natural heritage places higher than cultural institutions (museums, libraries and theatres). The findings also showed that the community valued cultural and natural heritage more than traditional engineering services, such as roads/footpaths, rubbish removal and even sporting facilities. The survey highlighted intergenerational differences, with cultural heritage places and cultural institutions ranking high only among Generation X and the generations prior (Builders and Baby Boomers). This has clear implications for the present provisioning of heritage services and community education. The paper concludes with an exploration of the long-term implications of the observed intergenerational differences for local government authorities and community development in general.

Keywords: community attitudes; cultural heritage management; generational perception; intergenerational change; local councils; urban planning

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1. Introduction

The sustainability and long-term viability of urban areas is based on an understanding and appreciation that the environmental, social and economic realities of a community are intertwined. For communities to become resilient and sustainable (UN SDG 11), urban planning needs to factor in a wide range of community and environmental services, ranging from transportation systems and affordable energy-efficient housing to the provision of greenspaces and social amenities. Such initiatives need to be seen against the background of existing developments that constitute a legacy: on the negative side of the ledger are housing developments and environmental sites in urgent need of remediation, whereas of the positive side are assets such as historic town cores that function as foci of community identity and attractions for visitors. Sustainable urban development has to include support for the social realities of a community, including its identity and sense of place, commonly exemplified through cultural heritage assets.

Cultural heritage are those traces and practices of human interaction with the environment and with each other that communities and individuals value today and wish to preserve for the benefit of the present generations [1,2]. Cultural heritage is commonly constructed in a dichotomy between the tangible (e.g., objects, sites, structures, places) and

intangible (e.g., traditions, customs, language, dance) domains of heritage assets [3–5]. This paper will be primarily concerned with tangible, non-moveable heritage assets.

The actual management of non-moveable heritage assets occurs *on the ground* at the community and local government council levels. Accepting that the following exposition represents part of the authorized heritage discourse [2,6], the management of a community's cultural heritage assets commonly occurs through the avenues of protection, preservation and interpretation. The authorized heritage discourse asserts that tangible cultural heritage assets are scarce, finite and unrenewable [7,8] and are therefore ascribed a range of values by the community [9–13] and that these values, as all community-based values, are mutable and undergo intergenerational change [14–16]. Heritage assets are commonly protected though their inclusion in heritage registers or lists with associated planning and development controls. They are subject to conservation and site management plans that are designed to ensure that their significant cultural values can be maintained and interpreted for the social and mental health benefit of the present generation [1,17–19], with claims that these extend into the future [20].

Given that the majority of heritage assets, in particular in heritage conservation areas or historic districts, are not owned by government entities but by corporations and private citizens, the latter are direct stakeholders who need to be consulted [21]. The past two decades have seen a widespread departure from heavy-heading, top-down expert-driven approaches to an acceptance of community consultation [22–24]. The majority of heritage planning approaches construct community participation in terms of stakeholder participation [24–29] in workshop settings [30], in particular with regard to specific sites [31,32]. The purposeful of stakeholders as well as the role of professionals in steering the process can consciously or subconsciously skew the outcomes [33,34]. Genuine, bottom-up community-driven heritage planning remains still uncommon, however [35].

Much of the recent debate in the academic literature has focused, on a theoretical and somewhat abstract level, on how heritage and heritage conservation align with several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals [36–44]. Implicit in this is that a given local government has a community mandate to protect a community's heritage. In fact, all planning controls derived from community heritage studies are predicated on the assumption that the local community actually values its heritage, appreciates its protection and supports local council investment and actions in the matter. This assumption is treated as axiomatic but is only very rarely formally tested [34]. This paper will provide a case study that examines to what degree a community actually supports its heritage relative to other services offered by a local government authority.

1.1. Context

In the Australian setting, heritage assets can be protected at the Commonwealth (i.e., national), state and local government levels. The protection of Indigenous Australian heritage assets is subject to state legislation with overarching, constitutionally enabled Commonwealth powers [45]. The management of the heritage of Australian settler colonialists and subsequent immigrants remains the constitutional prerogative of the states and territories, unless heritage assets are Commonwealth-owned or are located on Commonwealth-owned land, or a state government has nominated the asset for national heritage status and listing [45]. State and territorial governments have set up heritage management regimes that have devolved the majority of primary heritage asset management to the local government councils. These exercise all aspects of heritage asset identification, listing on local planning schemes and protection though planning controls such as development control plans. Only where heritage assets are deemed to be of state-wide, rather than just local significance and thus included on the state heritage register, will local government management decisions be reviewed by the relevant state heritage bodies [45].

Although the nomination of heritage assets as new and additional listings or the request for delisting and removal from the current protective rule set can happen at any time, these actions more commonly occur at the time of local government area-wide heritage studies and reviews. Rather than being purely expert driven, such local government area-wide studies are executed as community heritage studies in the state of New South Wales [22,35,46]. In this setting, a group of community members, primarily self-nominated individuals drawn from a structured list of stakeholders and stakeholder groups and guided by a heritage professional and local council officers, reviews and assesses those heritage assets that were nominated for listing or delisting through public calls for nominations. A range of epistemologies influence the nominations as well as their evaluation [34], but the underlying tenet is that the protection of heritage assets is beneficial to the common good [9,10]. Whereas the local community has formal input in the development of community heritage studies on a procedural level, its ability to influence local development control plans is limited to a public comment period. The local community has no direct input, or right of comment, on individual property heritage conservation management plans.

Colloquially and facetiously, the priorities and primary functions of local government councils are often circumscribed as the "three Rs" of "roads, rates and rubbish" [47,48]. This is narrow and erroneous construct, as councils engage in a wide number of community services, ranging from preschools and community centers to parks and gardens, sporting facilities and public events. Although the protection of cultural heritage assets is a legitimate objective in its own right, it is important to realize that, except in very rare, rate-rich locales, a council's funding and staffing resources are limited and that therefore the protection of heritage assets competes in funding with all other services that a local council offers. Yet, as advocated by historical societies and other stakeholder groups, cultural heritage planning and heritage protection is often seen, rather unrealistically, as a special case to be considered in isolation from the provisioning of other council services. At the same time, business interests often position heritage protection as an impediment to commercial and residential development, pressuring local government bodies to ease heritage-related planning controls.

From a public policy perspective, therefore, it is important for a local government council to understand what level of importance the general public attributes to the preservation and protection of cultural heritage places relative to other community services offered by the local government body, as well as other community agencies and/private operators (e.g., childcare and hospitals).

Although community satisfaction surveys, which assess community perceptions of a local government's service delivery, are common tools [49–52], studies that rank the relative relevance of services to a community are rare. Studies that assess the relative importance of heritage protection in the wider remit of local government operations are absent.

1.2. The Project

As part of a community-based cultural heritage study carried out in 2022 in Albury, a regional service center in southern New South Wales (Australia) [53], broadscale community consultation was carried out, not only via the customary call for nominations of heritage places but also through a formal survey to gauge community attitudes to heritage in general and heritage preservation on the local government area of Albury in particular. As part of this process, it was deemed important to understand the role and relative importance that the community attributes to heritage in relation to other community services.

Given that cultural heritage values, like all community-based values, are mutable and undergo intergenerational change [14–16], it was posited that community perceptions and community-based values would not be uniform across the population. It was hypothesized that a stratification along generational lines would be likely [14,15], given that generations are socio-cultural constructs that encapsulate a form of collective identity created by shared experiences of a group of people of similar ages [54].

This paper focusses on two aspects. First it will consider the nature of survey participation in relation to the mode of survey administration; it will then present the results of this part of the survey and will extrapolate the findings to discuss the current and future role of heritage in the face of intergenerational stratification. The latter allows to project, to some degree, how heritage will be valued as the older generation passes away.

2. Methodology

In 2022 the Albury City Council (NSW, Australia) carried out a heritage study, which included a community survey, a survey of owners of heritage-listed properties and a survey of real estate agents—the latter two out are outside the scope of this paper.

2.1. Survey Instrument and Sampling Frame

The survey instrument comprised of six framing questions to understand how familiar the respondent was with Albury and the nature of residential arrangements (owner, renter), four open-ended attitudinal questions and five closed attitudinal questions, some of which had multiple sub-questions or required ranking. Three demographic questions were asked at the end.

The sampling frame for the community survey was open to all people over 18 years of age who were living, working or shopping in Albury. Former residents were also eligible to participate.

2.2. Survey Administration

The heritage study and links to the community survey were advertised as per AlburyCity's standard community consultation process in the "Have Your Say" section of the council website [55], digital newsletter [56] and Facebook site [57,58], as well as on A3-format color posters mounted on noticeboards in public libraries and community centers. In addition, links to the community survey were included in letters sent directly to the owners of heritage-listed properties and through direct approaches by the author. The latter were distributed in person during conversations, via e-mails to social and professional networks and via a post to the author's community noticeboard. All invitations to participate included the suggestion to pass on the links to other interested parties (snowballing).

All surveys used the SurveyMonkey Platform managed by the Spatial Analysis Network, Charles Sturt University. All responses were anonymous and identifiable information (e.g., IP addresses) was removed prior to the author receiving the dataset. Individual collectors with unique URLs were created to be able to trace from which information source (i.e., website, newsletter, direct approaches by the author) the response originated.

Figure 1 shows the flow of responses from the main sampling sub-frames. The responses derived from AlburyCity's "Have Your Say" webpage may be slightly inflated as a clerical error during the poster production process saw the QR code reserved for the "Have Your Say" webpage used on the public poster. Moreover, although the letters to the owners, as well as direct e-mailed approaches by the author carried specific collector URLs, they were also required to include a web-linked reference to AlburyCity's "Have Your Say" webpage. Some leaching of responses may have occurred through these venues.

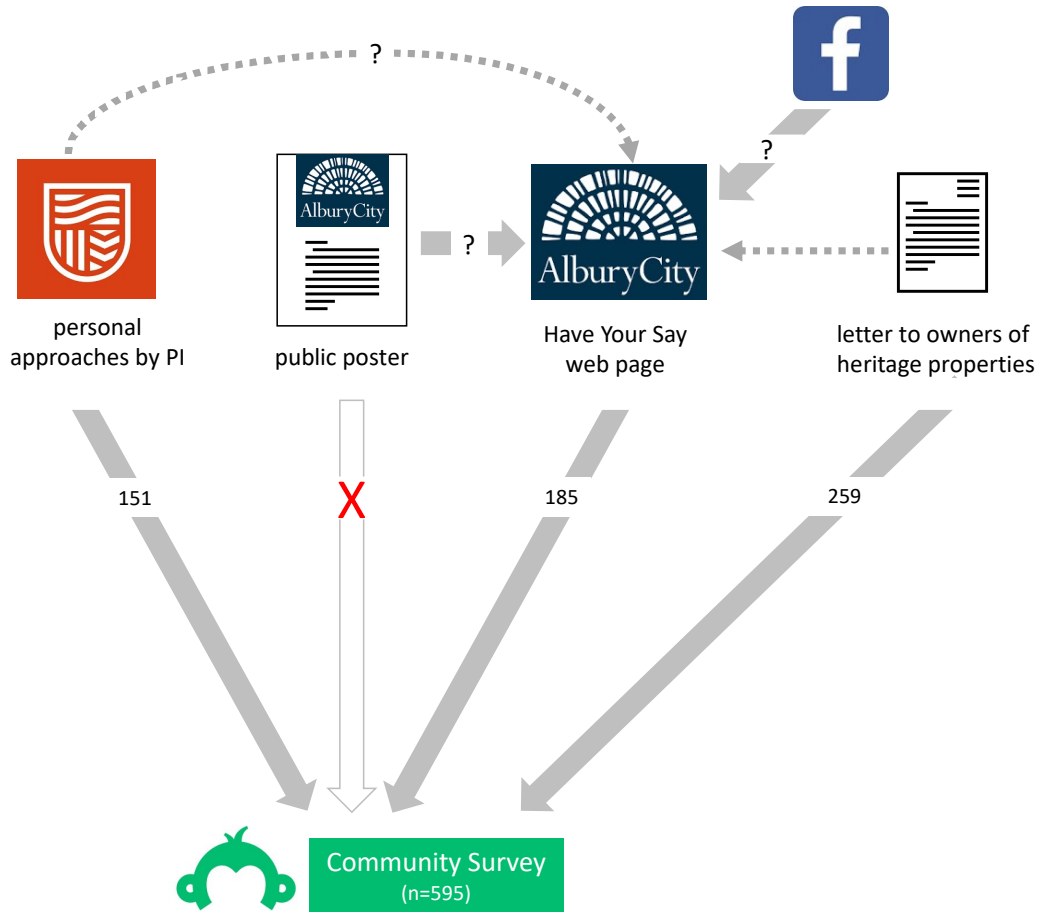

Figure 1. Flow of responses to the community survey (based on the different collectors).

2.3. Survey Completion

In total, 595 surveys were started and at least partially completed. Given the nature of the sampling, which relied on diffuse targeting combined with anticipated snowballing, it is not possible to estimate the actual response rates. Some approximation, however, is possible. The projected population for Albury for the end of 2021 was 55,574 people [59]. Assuming that the age structure does not vary significantly between the 2016 census and the 2021 estimate, then the theoretical total population of people living in Albury who were eligible to participate (i.e., 18 years of age and older) is 43,074. A total number of 595 started surveys therefore equates to a population-wide response rate of 1.38%.

An online management of a survey via SurveyMonkey, where the questions are delivered as a set of discrete pages (screenfuls) with the respondent actively moving from one to the next, enables capturing survey data until the point (i.e., the page) where the survey was abandoned. Calculating the persistence of respondents, 72.4% of those who started the nine-page community survey completed it. Given that the demographic questions (age, gender) were asked on the final page, it is not possible to examine whether specific generations have a higher attrition rate than others.

2.4. Generational Recoding

Although the age data were collected in the five-year age classes as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics [60], the commonly used generational terms of "Builders" ("Lucky Generation," before 1946), "Baby Boomers" (1946–1964), "Generation X" (1965–1979), "Millennials" ("Generation Y" 1980–1994) and "Generation Z" ("i Generation", "post-Millennials", 1995–2004 [2012]) are more applicable as they are based on both sociocultural, economic and technological parameters [61,62]. Since the recorded ABS age brackets do not directly port to the generational logic, the generational brackets were approximated

by recoding as follows: 18–29 Generation Z; 30–44 Millennials; 45–59 Generation X; 60–74 Baby Boomers; and 75+ Builders.

2.5. Analysis

The processing of data occurred in MS Excel as an exploratory analysis with descriptive and comparative statistics between generational cohorts.

3. Results—Participation

In total 595 individual responses were received. Just under a third of these (31.1%) came through the channel of the council's standard community consultation process (web page, newsletter, posters, Facebook). Significantly more responses (43.5%, $\chi^2 = 19.543$, df = 1, $p < 0.0001$) were received from owners of heritage-listed properties who responded to a written invitation (letter) to comment on heritage issues. Direct approaches by the author made up a quarter of the overall responses (25.4%) which was significantly lower than the percentage contributed by the council's standard community consultation process ($\chi^2 = 4.765$, df = 1, $p = 0.0290$) [63].

To assess whether the survey is representative of the general population from which the respondents are drawn, the age breakdown of the respondents was compared with the 2016 census, which is the most recent census for which data at the LGA level are available [64]. Whereas the overall population has grown since then, it is unlikely that the age structure will have changed in a significant fashion. Thus, the age distribution of the 2016 census (of people over 18 years) allows us to develop a theoretical age and gender distribution that can then be compared against the distribution of actual responses.

The age profile of the respondents to the community survey shows a very significant under-representation in the 20–24 year old age cohort and significant under-representation in the 25–29, 85–89 and 90+ cohorts, whereas the 40–54-year-old cohorts are significantly over-represented (Figure 2).

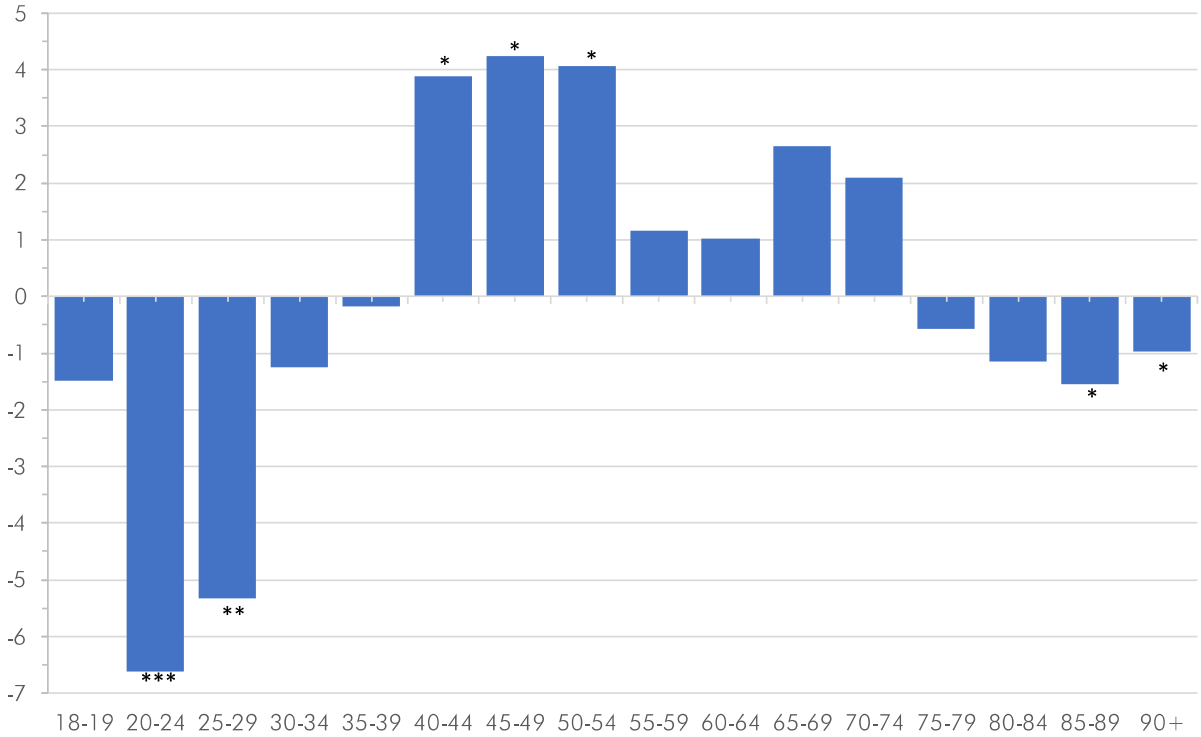

Figure 2. Age profile of the responses. Deviation (in %) from the general population (ABS 2016) [64]. Confidence intervals * $p = 0.05$; ** $p = 0.01$; *** $p = 0.001$.

When the data are collapsed by generation, then the differences are more pronounced (Table 1). Baby Boomers and Generation X are significantly overrepresented, whereas Millennials show lower participation rates in the survey than older cohorts.

Table 1. Age profile (in %) of the responses to the community survey (by generation) compared with the general population (2016) [64]. Confidence intervals * $p = 0.05$; ** $p = 0.01$; *** $p = 0.001$.

Generation	Period	ABS	Survey	Over-/Under Representation	Significance
Builders	<1946	10.71	6.47	−4.23	*
Baby Boomers	1946–1964	20.08	26.38	+6.30	**
Generation X	1965–1979	24.81	33.81	+9.00	***
Millennials	1980–1994	23.95	25.66	+1.71	
Generation Z	1995–2004	20.46	7.67	−12.78	***
Total		100	100		

As the survey was open to all people over 18 years of age who were living (or had lived), working or shopping in Albury, it was necessary to assess the level of authority that can be attributed to the views represented. In essence, had the respondent lived in Albury for a period that was sufficient to form an opinion of the community's heritage?

Overall, three quarters of the respondents had lived or worked in Albury for ten years or longer (Table 2). Fewer than 6% of the respondents had been in Albury for two years or less. These data indicate that the overwhelming majority of respondents had sufficient time and exposure to the town to be able to form a considered opinion regarding Albury's heritage.

Table 2. Length of experience (years) of respondents with personal experience of Albury by generation (in % of generation).

	Personal Experience of Albury (Years)						
Generation	**<1**	**1–2**	**3–5**	**6–10**	**10–20**	**>20**	***n***
Builders	2.28	2.28	6.82	13.63	22.72	52.27	48
Baby Boomers	—	3.12	6.25	6.25	18.75	65.62	112
Generation X	2.90	2.17	9.42	9.42	18.84	57.25	145
Millennials	0.99	4.95	11.88	12.87	25.74	43.57	112
Generation Z	2.78	5.56	11.11	11.11	19.44	50.00	51
No generational data	1.32	4.61	5.92	13.16	19.74	55.26	218
Total	1.59	3.70	8.29	10.94	20.64	54.85	567

4. Results—Perceived Relevance of Heritage

One section of the community survey aimed to understand the perceived relevance of heritage in relation to other community and council services (Figure 3). Participants were asked "how important are the following matters (arranged alphabetically) *to you* personally" and were offered a total of seventeen services that they were required to rank from 1 to 17. The SurveyMonkey online questionnaire was coded in such a fashion that respondents had to allocate a unique rank to each service category, forcing them to prioritize one service category over another.

Figure 3. Examples of community assets and services, Albury (NSW). (**A**) Albury Railway Station (1881); (**B**) Albury LibraryMuseum (2007); (**C**) Community Garden, Bilson Park (2021); (**D**) Oddie's Creek Playground; (**E**) Albury Botanic Gardens.

Given that the participation in the survey was based on a certain level of self-selection and that the results may therefore exhibit a level of bias, it is not surprising that "Cultural heritage (protecting and preserving heritage places)" might rank highly (Table 3). What is also surprising, however, is that it ranked second, albeit significantly lower than the service group "Hospital and other Medical Services" ($p < 0.0001$). The average ranking of cultural heritage is statistically indistinguishable from the average rankings given to "public parks,"

"natural bushland" and "aged-care facilities" but significantly higher than "school and education" ($p = 0.05$) and "disability services" ($p < 0.0001$).

Table 3. Importance of community services (by rank). The lower the average, the greater the importance.

Overall Rank	Community Service	Avg Rank ± St Dev	*n*
1	Hospital	3.67 ± 3.45	418
2	Cultural heritage	6.88 ± 4.27	417
3	Public parks	7.10 ± 4.13	420
4	Aged care facilities	7.17 ± 4.93	416
5	Natural bushland	7.37 ± 4.75	417
6	School and education	7.77 ± 4.86	423
7	Disability services	8.55 ± 4.52	418
8	Children's playgrounds	8.90 ± 4.42	416
9	Childcare facilities	9.37 ± 4.86	415
10	Footpaths	9.45 ± 4.39	415
11	Rubbish removal	9.85 ± 4.45	420
12	Museums	10.09 ± 4.33	416
13	Library services	10.34 ± 3.77	417
14	Roads and parking	10.36 ± 4.55	414
15	Community gardens	11.11 ± 4.77	416
16	Sporting facilities	11.80 ± 4.67	421
17	Theatres	12.16 ± 4.37	422

When broken down by generation, differences emerge in the average ranking between the service categories, in particular between the generational extremes (Table 4). Most dramatic in this regard are "museums" which have an average rank of 8.88 ± 4.48 among Baby Boomers but only 12.55 ± 3.65 among Generation Z. Considerable consensus exists only for "Hospital and other Medical Services," as reflected by a narrow spread in average ranking, 3.34 ± 3.30 (Baby Boomers) to 4.39 ± 3.13 (Generation Z).

Table 4. Importance of community services (average rank) by generation (arranged alphabetically). The lower the average, the greater the importance.

Community Service	Builders	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Millennials	Generation Z
Aged-care facilities	6.97 ± 4.75 (*n* = 34)	5.91 ± 4.31 (*n* = 105)	7.28 ± 4.88 (*n* = 137)	8.56 ± 5.37 (*n* = 101)	7.45 ± 4.54 (*n* = 31)
Childcare facilities	9.53 ± 5.51 (*n* = 34)	9.65 ± 4.72 (*n* = 105)	10.17 ± 4.69 (*n* = 136)	8.91 ± 5.03 (*n* = 102)	7.65 ± 3.76 (*n* = 31)
Children's playgrounds	7.73 ± 4.50 (*n* = 33)	9.56 ± 4.17 (*n* = 105)	9.95 ± 4.17 (*n* = 137)	7.41 ± 4.46 (*n* = 101)	9.52 ± 4.35 (*n* = 31)
Community gardens	11.39 ± 4.88 (*n* = 33)	11.63 ± 4.92 (*n* = 103)	11.21 ± 4.46 (*n* = 138)	10.93 ± 4.60 (*n* = 102)	11.03 ± 5.56 (*n* = 31)
Cultural heritage	5.41 ± 4.48 (*n* = 34)	6.54 ± 3.83 (*n* = 103)	7.32 ± 4.21 (*n* = 139)	7.52 ± 4.54 (*n* = 101)	6.39 ± 4.59 (*n* = 31)
Disability services	8.32 ± 4.54 (*n* = 34)	8.64 ± 4.43 (*n* = 106)	9.03 ± 4.58 (*n* = 137)	8.46 ± 4.74 (*n* = 101)	7.23 ± 4.06 (*n* = 31)
Footpaths	9.15 ± 4.37 (*n* = 33)	9.48 ± 4.67 (*n* = 106)	9.36 ± 4.46 (*n* = 137)	9.64 ± 4.31 (*n* = 100)	9.81 ± 3.81 (*n* = 31)
Hospital	3.97 ± 3.84 (*n* = 33)	3.34 ± 3.30 (*n* = 105)	3.67 ± 3.74 (*n* = 139)	3.50 ± 3.13 (*n* = 101)	4.39 ± 3.13 (*n* = 31)
Library services	8.97 ± 3.25 (*n* = 34)	10.02 ± 3.66 (*n* = 103)	10.71 ± 4.07 (*n* = 140)	10.05 ± 3.60 (*n* = 102)	12.29 ± 3.21 (*n* = 31)
Museums	9.71 ± 4.73 (*n* = 34)	8.88 ± 4.48 (*n* = 104)	10.22 ± 4.28 (*n* = 138)	10.50 ± 4.03 (*n* = 101)	12.55 ± 3.65 (*n* = 31)
Natural bushland	8.03 ± 4.99 (*n* = 34)	7.50 ± 4.67 (*n* = 104)	7.30 ± 4.95 (*n* = 139)	6.88 ± 4.37 (*n* = 102)	7.10 ± 5.29 (*n* = 31)
Public parks	7.31 ± 4.06 (*n* = 35)	6.59 ± 4.12 (*n* = 106)	6.73 ± 3.74 (*n* = 139)	7.48 ± 4.39 (*n* = 101)	8.10 ± 4.59 (*n* = 31)
Roads and parking	11.15 ± 3.32 (*n* = 33)	10.85 ± 4.37 (*n* = 103)	10.07 ± 4.93 (*n* = 139)	10.34 ± 4.32 (*n* = 100)	8.97 ± 5.13 (*n* = 31)
Rubbish removal	9.50 ± 5.03 (*n* = 34)	9.75 ± 4.66 (*n* = 107)	9.47 ± 4.46 (*n* = 139)	10.45 ± 4.16 (*n* = 101)	9.77 ± 3.95 (*n* = 31)
School and education	9.31 ± 4.75 (*n* = 36)	8.85 ± 4.56 (*n* = 106)	6.79 ± 4.63 (*n* = 139)	7.51 ± 5.18 (*n* = 102)	6.55 ± 4.15 (*n* = 31)
Sporting facilities	12.29 ± 4.42 (*n* = 34)	12.47 ± 4.50 (*n* = 106)	10.96 ± 4.83 (*n* = 139)	12.20 ± 4.33 (*n* = 102)	10.77 ± 5.23 (*n* = 31)
Theatres	11.50 ± 4.47 (*n* = 36)	11.95 ± 4.42 (*n* = 105)	11.81 ± 4.36 (*n* = 139)	12.68 ± 4.21 (*n* = 101)	13.45 ± 3.85 (*n* = 31)

Illustrative are the relative rankings per generation, which show considerable variation in importance between the various service categories (Table 5) Some patterns emerge when considering the importance of cultural heritage for each generation in comparison with other environmental and cultural services (Figure 4). Cultural heritage clusters with environmental spaces (public parks and natural bushland) are well ahead of other cultural services such as library services, museums and theatres. Although the relative ranking of cultural heritage may be overstated due to self-selection bias, the relative importance of cultural services in relation to the natural environment is certain. In a comparison of the importance of cultural heritage for each generation with "hard" council services such as roads and rubbish, cultural heritage sits well above in the respondents' priorities (Figure 5).

Table 5. Relative ranking of the relative importance of community services for each generation (sorted by the relative ranking sequence of the total sample).

Community Service	All *	Builders	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Millennials	Generation Z
Hospital	1	1	1	1	1	1
Cultural heritage	2	2	5	4	6	3
Public parks	3	3	2	2	4	8
Aged-care facilities	4	4	3	8	10	6
Natural bushland	5	8	9	5	2	7
School and education	6	5	6	3	3	2
Disability services	7	7	4	11	9	4
Children's playgrounds	8	9	10	14	5	11
Childcare facilities	9	14	12	17	8	5
Footpaths	10	12	8	13	14	9
Rubbish removal	11	13	7	7	13	10
Museums	12	11	11	10	11	15
Library services	13	6	13	6	7	13
Roads and parking	14	15	16	9	16	12
Community gardens	15	17	17	16	12	16
Sporting facilities	16	16	14	12	15	14
Theatres	17	10	15	15	17	17

(*) includes rankings where respondents did not provide age data.

Rank	Builders	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Millennials	Generation Z
1					
2	Heritage	Parks	Parks	Bushland	
3	Parks				Heritage
4			Heritage	Parks	
5		Heritage	Bushland		
6	Library		Library	Heritage	
7				Library	Bushland
8	Bushland				Parks
9		Bushland			
10	Theatres		Museums		
11	Museums	Museums		Museums	
12					
13		Library			Library
14					
15		Theatres	Theatres		Museums
16					
17				Theatres	Theatres

Figure 4. Relative ranking of the importance of cultural heritage for each generation in comparison with other environmental and cultural services. Color coding: green—nature spaces; red—heritage; yellow—cultural services.

When the generation-based responses for each service category (Table 4) are reclassified into relative ranking (highest ranking = 1, second highest = 2) *between* each generation, a seriation causes some patterns to emerge (Figure 6). Among the Builders generation, cultural services (library services, theatres, cultural heritage) rank the highest (together with footpaths), whereas, by and large, they rank very low among Generation Z (Figure 6). Conversely, most of the service categories that rank highest among Generation Z (childcare facilities, roads and parking, school and education, sporting facilities) rank lowest among the Builders generation. The pattern holds up for the "adjacent" generation but is less well

defined. Thus, children's playgrounds, community gardens and natural bushland are most important to the Millennials but not to Baby Boomers and Builders.

Rank	Builders	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Millenials	Generation Z
1					
2	Heritage				
3					Heritage
4			Heritage		
5		Heritage		Playgrounds	
6				Heritage	
7		Rubbish	Rubbish		
8		Footpaths			
9	Playgrounds		Roads/Parking		Footpaths
10		Playgrounds			Rubbish
11					Playgrounds
12	Footpaths		Sporting	Comm. Gardens	Roads/Parking
13	Rubbish		Footpaths	Rubbish	
14		Sporting	Playgrounds	Footpaths	Sporting
15	Roads/Parking			Sporting	
16	Sporting	Roads/Parking	Comm. Gardens	Roads/Parking	Comm. Gardens
17	Comm. Gardens	Comm. Gardens			

Figure 5. Relative ranking of the importance of cultural heritage for each generation in comparison with other infrastructure services. Color coding: green—engineering services; purple—community services; red—heritage.

Community Service	Builders	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Millennials	Generation Z
Library services	1	2	4	3	5
Footpaths	1	3	2	4	5
Theatres	1	3	2	4	5
Cultural heritage	1	3	4	5	2
Museums	2	1	3	4	5
Aged care facilities	2	1	3	5	4
Rubbish removal	2	3	1	5	4
Public parks	3	1	2	4	5
Hospital	4	1	3	2	5
Children's playgrounds	2	4	5	1	3
Natural bushland	5	4	3	1	2
Community gardens	4	5	3	1	2
Child care facilities	3	4	5	2	1
Roads and parking	5	4	2	3	1
School and education	5	4	2	3	1
Sporting facilities	4	5	2	3	1
Disability services	2	4	5	3	1

Figure 6. Seriation and clustering of the relative ranking of the importance of community services within each generation.

5. Discussion

The activities and priorities of local governments/councils are caught in the tension between state-government-imposed mandates, public and constituent opinion as expressed through the views of the elected councilors and the operational requirements of professional council staff. Although community opinion is sought regularly, this commonly occurs through targeted stakeholder consultation, opt-in surveys via council websites (such as Albury City's "Have your say") part-way through a planning process, as well as at the exhibition stage when the planning process is almost complete. Social-science-based community surveys designed to gauge an in-depth understanding of community opinion on an issue are rare.

The extent and nature of participation in community surveys is indicative of community involvement and the relevance of the topic to the community. This needs to be tempered with the knowledge that, at least in the Australian setting, the community is by and large "over surveyed" and suffers from "survey fatigue," which impacts the participation rate [65,66].

This survey, like all voluntary community surveys, suffers from self-reporting bias, where only those who take an interest in the subject matter will respond. Although this holds true for any survey, this applies more so to this survey, as it was carried out by a public call to participation with snowballing, rather than a phone survey or mailout to a randomly selected, representative sample of the population. Rather than being prompted directly, potential participants had to "subscribe" to and utilize the specific communications channels used for dissemination of the survey and then opt into participating.

Comparative data to assess the level of public engagement with that exhibited for the heritage surveys are unavailable. Whereas a perusal of AlburyCity's "Have Your Say" webpage shows that community surveys are widely employed, only one of the surveys administered by council in 2022 publicly discloses the number of respondents [67]. That sole example (Ernest Grant Park Master Plan) received 209 responses.

Given that participation in the survey was based on self-nomination of those interested, the differences in representation from the wider population can be explained as follows: by and large, the younger generation is less interested in heritage and has a lower participation in heritage-related activities and associations. Further, the publicity methodology espoused, i.e., Facebook, Council website and community posters, favors Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials (see below for definitions), whereas Generation Z are primarily consumers of the TikTok, SnapChat and Instagram platforms [68–71]. At the other end of the spectrum, it can be posited that the 80+ population is less technologically literate and thus more reluctant to use digital input technology (if at all).

The differences are more pronounced when the data are collapsed by generation (Table 1). Baby Boomers and Generation X are significantly overrepresented, which correlates well with other studies that showed that these two generations have a higher level of community engagement and participation than the subsequent generations [72,73]. Millennials show lower participation rates in the survey than older cohorts [74] and also tend to be less community engaged [73].

At the outset, it was posited that community perceptions and community-based values with regard to heritage and other services provided by local government authorities would not be uniform across the population but a stratification along generational lines would be likely [14,15]. This was indeed the case.

As the survey relied on self-nominated participation, the results may be biased towards heritage; the relative rankings of the other community services is not affected by this. Thus, it is of significance that the community valued cultural and natural heritage more than services such as roads/footpaths, rubbish removal and even sporting facilities and that natural heritage places ranked higher than the traditional cultural activities of museums, libraries and theatres. The survey highlighted intergenerational differences, with cultural heritage places and cultural institutions ranking high only among Generation X and the generations prior (Builders, Baby Boomers). They ranked particularly low among

Millennials and Generation Z, who as techno-natives (*sensu* Inayatullah [75]) (Gen Z) and techno-migrants (Millenials) grew up and lived in a world where many if not most cultural services are delivered via digital media.

6. Conclusions and Implications

The findings of a heritage study and community survey in Albury, a regional service center in Southern NSW (Australia), showed that the community valued cultural and natural heritage more than traditional engineering services and sporting facilities and that cultural and natural heritage places ranked higher than cultural institutions. On an immediate level, this has direct implications for Albury Council, since it provides a justification to take a stronger stance for heritage protection when pressured by developers and provides justification to support this aspect of council operations through adequate staffing. This study also provides a template for other local government authorities to poll their own constituencies. Future work in other settings should include aspects of social and economic stratification to provide a more nuanced picture of the generational differences.

On a broader scale, of importance is the observation of a generational shift, where traditional cultural activities such as museums, libraries and theatres are being assigned very low importance by Millennials and Generation Z. At present, there is ample support for heritage protection among those generations that dominate the decision makers (e.g., Baby Boomers and Gen X). The emerging disconnect between the traditional mode of interaction via tangible and sensory experience in the "real" world and the emergent mode of interaction in a "digital" world, however, has clear implications for the present and future provisioning of heritage services and in particular for community heritage education. Unless Millennials and Generation Z develop a sense of attachment to heritage assets and cultural institutions in their traditional form, heritage "as we know it" may well lose its significance to a community's sense of wellbeing, with tangible heritage assets such as buildings and sites becoming a liability, except for those that generate economic benefits, such as tourist attractions popularized on digital media.

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